



INCLUDING DISABILITY IN THE MAINSTREAM EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

When we decide to become teachers and pursue our profession we all think of being perfect at it. Once we join any particular school and start taking classes; is when we realize that all children are not same. Every child in the classroom has varied and different needs. This is the time when we feel our job is difficult and it is impossible to cater to the needs of every child separately. The journey of becoming a teacher to a regular classroom make us have a different outlook about teaching. One thing in this perspective becomes very important that the role of the teacher is the epitome of kindness and Congeniality. Therefore, when we indulge ourselves in a respectable profession like teaching we must also inculcate in us some values which would make us feel that 'Nothing is Impossible'. It is our duty to teach pupil with diversity. Any child in the class is our responsibility and we must ensure the development of the child by making a separate way of teaching for them. To teach and to cater to individual needs one must not follow any rule or strict strategy it can be anything and anyway whatever facilitates the child. The term 'disability' has been misunderstood by many. Any 'disability' is not necessarily always physical or intellectual. It can be the mindset that leads to disability of the mind and the most dangerous of all disabilities is the mental block that community and society practice towards the people with different needs. This is not at all true that the people with different needs have no ability at all and would never contribute anything to the society. Rather every person has his/her own set of abilities and disabilities. We all have our own drawbacks and limitations which makes even simpler activities difficult for us. Therefore every person is differently-able and this reality must be accepted with open heart and mind. Our Government and the United Nations Organization too have taken multiple initiative to make Inclusion a reality therefore as teachers and school administration is becomes our primary duty to impart education to all with or without any difficulty. Any education and school can be successful only if it inculcates high moral values in pupils. Inclusion can become a reality only if our society has an open mindset and outlook towards people with different needs.

INTRODUCTION:

I have always believed that every child has the ability to learn; may not the same day or the same way. Right to Education Act under the Indian Constitution, Article 21A ; guarantees the compulsory education of children from 6 to 14 years of age. No child can be denied education under this provision. However in a country like India we have come across a number of instances where the Children with Disability has been denied education. The inadequate resourcing of this policy has been highly criticized by social and disability groups. At the first instance we will come across the schools who would state a medical condition for not admitting the child with disability and on the other hand the lack of proper infrastructure makes the school take a step back including disability in schools. However there was a slight change in situation with the UNCRPD (2006) coming into action and the Government of India took the initiative and made it mandatory for all schools to admit any child who comes for an admission despite his or her disability. The Government made it mandatory for all schools to not reject any application on the basis of disability. Apart from schools the teachers too become skeptic including a disabled child in the class. They have often come up with reason stating that it becomes difficult to teach a disabled child in the mainstream school with a stringent curriculum and mode of instruction. They have further stated that due to time crunch it becomes difficult for the teacher to impart separate instruction for the disabled child in the class and often it has been observed that the child gains nothing from the class and looks blank. The teacher concern also remain that the 'one- to-one' teaching for the severe cases of disability becomes difficult in a mainstream setting. Some teachers are also concern with the diagnosis of the special needs which can be done in a structured setup and not in a mainstream setup. Further, the various methods of teaching the special needs pupils is not possible to include in a mainstream setup, the group teaching becomes difficult with a child with disability in the group. Keeping the teachers' and school's concern in mind scholars and research has concluded that in a set up with diversity education and development is always at a fast rate and it also ensures a holistic development of children and individuals. Teacher concerns can be addressed only when teachers have empathy, correct outlook, patience and technical skills to include disability in the mainstream schools. The success of inclusion lies only when a teacher would respect diversity and the fact that every individual is different and has different contribution to make in the class. This diversity exist not only in children with disability but also otherwise.

Including children with disability in mainstream schools is a recent phenomenon and for over 30 years' disabled children were only taught in special schools with a limited scope of development. We have to understand the basic essence that no individual wants to be left alone and it is our moral duty to include every member of the society. Our Indian Constitution has guaranteed no discrimination on the basis of sex, creed, caste, class and religion and therefore, under this Article we the people of India cannot discriminate anyone. Only in a system where everyone is included and everyone is given the opportunity to contribute a holistic development is possible. No development can happen in isolation and therefore an inclusive society and inclusive education system is always the best.

What is Inclusion?

Inclusive practice ensures a system followed by school or community where every individual is welcomed. A system where there is no discrimination on sex, caste, creed, religion, disability, status or any other parameter and everyone is given an equal opportunity to contribute in the society. Every time we come across disability and their family we immediately tend to create a special separate group for their rehabilitation here we have to widen our mainstream thinking and accommodate the children with disability and their families in the mainstream practices and policies. Which means that any child with disability will have the right to get education, work and enjoy the same opportunities like the others and have the chance to study in the school where he wants to. To make inclusion a reality in schools we require a strong leadership, outlook and a sense of empathy among the administration and the teachers towards the child with disability and their families. Inclusion will be best practiced if the system is strong from above (Principal to Teachers). An inclusive practice only needs its members to believe that we all are 'one' even if not 'the same'. Exclusion is a social disease that needs to be attended at once. Mutual respect and acceptance makes a society work smoother and development becomes holistic in nature. Inclusion is basically a change that makes our society say 'Yes' than 'No'. Apart from the moral code of conduct according to psychologists also inclusion is a method which ensures an overall development of individuals. According to research works by Baker and colleagues it was reviewed that the most effective learning situation is the inclusive setup where the opportunities and progress of the children are wide giving one a scope to understand his strengths and needs to the fullest. A research study by Hunt & Goetz, in 1997 has given us evidence through a research work conducted by them that children with acute disability also have acquired a varied range of skills through social interaction, peer and communication with everyone. The social competence among the children has been boosted up in an inclusive setup. The social confidence and relationships are better with children in an inclusive setup compared to children in a special school setup because of the wide range of opportunities and skills they are exposed too. In an inclusive setup schools can ensure a common learning for all despite their skills. In a country like India were 3% of the population suffers from some kind of difficulty or the other it is important for all to know the common for better lifestyle and better opportunities.

How is Inclusion possible?

Inclusion is an umbrella under which the various needs are covered. For inclusion to be a reality it is important that every school and specially teachers look upon strengths of the child and not just deficits. The primary concern becomes that teachers always highlight the deficit of the child whereas if we focus on the strength of the child things become easier.

Schools must practice in a way that is more flexible and caters to the needs of the children with or without disability. The education system must focus on how to make learning fun and more exciting work should be incorporated to make learning possible for all. Schools must understand the various needs of the children and give teachers enough scope and opportunity to introduce more creativity in the methods of teaching. A strict tailor made curriculum often curbs the teachers

creativity and in the process hinders the learning of the children. A teacher knows her students the best and can accordingly tailor the curriculum based on the needs of her students.

Schools must modify the way it functions by giving lenient accommodations to children with disability like extra time to complete their work, visual prompts for children with disability. The school can also make adaptive chapters and question papers for children who cannot cope up with the general curriculum. The ICSE/ISC and the CBSE council does have exemptions for children with special needs like exemption from Hindi language, using a scribe, extra time while completing exams, using calculators for mathematical calculations, reading the question paper if the child has reading difficulties and many more. When the council accepts the various special needs of the children it is the duty of the schools too to incorporate the various needs of the children.

To include the special needs of the children in a school setup it is important to work as a team between administrators, teachers, special educators, community members and family members for a complete rehabilitation. Without a team effort it becomes difficult for anyone to meet the various needs of the children. To make sure that the special needs children are developed in all spheres it is important for a team to act accordingly.

In an inclusive setup when all the children are together it comes easier for buddy or peer teaching. Children always learn better from their friends and peer teaching has always made learning fun and is also a good method of revision for children.

One major misconception that teachers have is that there are fixed methods of teaching the special needs and only trained individuals can teach them. In reality teaching and learning is a realm where there is no fixed ground rule. Teachers can have their own innovative ways to teach the children in class with or without disability. In fact there have been a number of instances where innovative teaching has led to new teaching methods which benefit both children with or without disability.

Teachers can use mix tools to understand the needs and strengths of the children with special needs in their class. These mix tools include problem-solving, investigative learning, direct instruction, hands-on learning and teaching, multimedia and technology.

Schools must rethink and reconstruct their policies at a regular interval to have a flexible outlook and approach towards children with special needs.

Teachers can bring a major change in the life of the children with special needs through involvement, motivation and acceptance.

Techniques which can help teachers:

Few common techniques which are very useful for teachers to accommodate a child with special needs in the class.

1. **Differentiated Instruction:** This is a strategy which can be used teaching any subject and by any teacher. Whenever a subject is taught in the class the teacher must mark the key points for the child with difficulty this helps the child to learn the important points. A teacher must ensure that the instructions given in the class are to the point and are close-end instructions. Demonstrative instructions becomes difficult for the child with language concerns. A to the point teaching and instruction is always beneficial for the child.
2. **Scaffolding:** This strategy focus on breaking into small chunks. Whenever a teacher represents a high-quality work to the students he/she must ensure that he is presenting it not at a time but with time and in small portions. These small portions are easy for a child to remember and act according to the needs of the desired activity.
3. **Graphic Representation:** Teachers must represent a pictorial diagram or chart or map to the child wherever possible. In middle-schools specially while teaching history dates and geography types of forest and soil graphic representation as a flowchart will be helpful for children to remember the points easily. Even for chemistry, physics and biology graphic representation is always useful. It is always easy for a child to remember diagrams and pictures than written text.
4. **Mnemonics:** Special children who has a retention concern can use this technique to remember spellings and also full forms. This is the process where the child learn through associating a keyword with the desired spelling he is trying to remember. Example: The order of the Great Lakes from west to east: Super Man Helps Every One. (Superior, Michigan, Huron, Erie, Ontario)
5. **Multi-sensory Approach:** Before we teach a child we must know the hidden skills of the child. As mentioned earlier that every child can learn and to make every child learn teachers must focus on the sensory skills of the child. Like what the child see, hear, smell, touch, taste the teacher must relate the

learning to the experiences of the child.

6. **Remedial Teaching:** This type of teaching is usually done outside the class giving a child an individual attention. The areas where the child needs help are identified and a structured teaching is planned for the child to facilitate him to cope up with the curriculum.
7. **Give extra-time:** It has been observed at a number of instances where the children with difficulty will have incomplete class works and home works. The teacher must give the child extra time to complete his class assignments. This would ensure completion of class work and the child too will be up to date with class notes.
8. **Repetition:** Children with special needs require repetition of the concepts being taught in the class. Teachers can present a same concept in different manner for the child to grasp it easily. The more number of times a child practice it would help him remember easily and for a longer time.
9. **Remember the concept of Multiple-Intelligence:** Always remember a child may not be good in everything. A child may be best in something and average in something else. Therefore always make the child feel wanted and needed. Always praise and motivate whatever the child is good at.
10. **Teaching from Simple to Complex:** While teaching always ensure that you are teaching a child a simpler concept before presenting him a high order thinking concept. We all require a set of pre-requisite skills before learning complex theories. Therefore always present an easy task to the child and only then slowly gradually introduce him to higher concepts.
11. **Activity-Oriented Learning:** Children usually learn faster with experiments. Any subject can be taught easily if teachers while teaching relates any real life situation with the concepts. Once the child can relate a concept with real life he tends to never forget it and learning becomes easy and fun-filled.
12. **Use Innovative teaching strategies:** To accommodate a slow learner in the class a teacher must use innovative strategies to include him in the class. Peer-tutoring is one of the best methods to teach a child. A high achiever can be paired with a slow achiever and both can help each other inspiring inclusive outlook. The teacher can also include the child in small group work where he will be assigned goals which are achievable to keep the child motivated to learn and participate.
13. **Maintaining Friendly-relationship:** The teacher must be a friend, philosopher and guide to the child. The child with difficulty must feel free to interact with the teacher to share and feel free to ask for help.
14. **Teach Basics:** Do not forget to teach basic to the child. Unless the basic knowledge of a child is strong enough no other knowledge will be beneficial for learning.
15. **Don't Separate:** Do not put the child alone in the class. Make sure he has friends around him for support and help.
16. **Enhance curiosity in children:** A teacher must primarily dig curiosity in the mind of the child. Once the child is eager to know learning automatically becomes easier and the child will contribute to the process of learning.
17. **Adaptive Curriculum:** Teachers must ensure that the curriculum which is taught to the child with difficulty is done keeping in mind the needs of the child and the capability to understand the concept. Teachers must point out the key points from the chapter to make learning little easy and burden free.
18. **Conduct Group Discussion:** Group discussions are always a fun activity for children. A lot of unconscious learning takes place through discussion. When children explain they always done it through an easy language which makes learning fun for children. They also understand easy languages better.

One basic understanding for teachers are essential that every child can be taught just by implying few practical strategies in the classroom. The level of understanding for every child is different and the mode of instruction followed by children are also different from one another. Therefore when every child is different there cannot be any consensus regarding how to teach them. A teacher must have flexibility in teaching such that she can accommodate every need of the child in the class. Even slow learners can learn only if taught in the correct manner. All we need to do is be empathic towards the needs of the child and not sympathetic.

Few strategies to improve learning skills:

Spelling:

1. Ensure that the pupil is using a multi-sensory method to learn spellings: read the word say the letters aloud, cover the word, write the word saying the letters aloud and check the word.
2. Method: to check the words again 10 minutes later to ensure that the words go from the short term to the long term memory

3. ensure that the pupil is recording own high frequency word errors
4. Use spell checker to learn the difficult words.
5. Ask the students to maintain one spelling dictionary of their own to remember the spellings more carefully.
6. Repeat the high-frequency words as often as possible.

Writing:

1. Allow the child to take extra time to finish his work.
2. Use different color chalks to write on the board to avoid confusion for the child.
3. Give clear and short instructions while writing.
4. Encourage the use of pre-set words while writing.
5. Work on your expectations.
6. Motivate and appreciate the child as often as possible.
7. Give regular fun worksheets to increase the speed of writing.

Handwriting:

1. Check the pincer grip of the child.
2. If still writing slow encourage the use of keyboard or any other method of writing.
3. Use scribe to reduce frustration.
4. Make the pupil write easy topic to develop interest for writing.

One thing we need to understand is that any strategy which works with the pupil is the best strategy. There is no guidebook or strict principles for Special Education Needs. It's all about how you accept the child and address to the needs.

Why is Inclusion still at a backseat?

For schools, management and teachers one common thing is the performance of the students in their board exams. This school average is the utmost concern for mainstream schools. To chase this high average schools usually neglect the needs of the children with difficulty as they at most instances cannot contribute to the high percentage the schools expect. We are still under the mentality that "these children cannot do". "Cannot do" is an easy term to say but as teachers as a school the primary concern should be learning no matter how when and by whom. Staying alone is not easy for anyone. We all want to be included and accepted the way we are, so are the children with special needs who wants their different needs to be addressed. Teaching styles and teaching techniques of teachers must be revised. As teachers they must also learn everyday and bring change in their teaching techniques which can include and cater to the needs of the children with various difficulties. Schools must also take the initiative towards including children in school with various needs. Only if at the school level we can start inclusion we can think of an inclusive society in future without any discrimination. The exclusive instructions for the children become difficult for regular teachers in a regular classroom, but beyond the difficulties there is one fact that remains is: "a teacher is one who teaches the way I understand." Therefore, children who come to school looking forward to learn something new each day must not be sent back empty hand because the more we spread the more we learn.

CONCLUSION:

Every child can learn. This is one truth that needs to be explored more using practical techniques and strategies to inculcate a learning environment in schools. One must always remember his own school days; we did not learn Math, English, Social Studies, and Economics in one day or through a common method of teaching. We all did have our own struggle learning all the subjects and writing an exam thereafter. Similarly children also have various different needs; someone may be good in language, someone in math or someone in sports. Therefore all these different skills and talents have to address to make effective learning. So far in the article I have not mentioned about the criteria of disability and who are the people who should be included that is simply because before we know the degrees of disability the first and foremost thing we should cultivate is empathy towards people with or without difficulty. Difficulty may not always be a physical it can be intellectual and emotional difficulties also which cannot be seen but can be observed and rectified. It is very important that schools include disability in the mainstream education because it is only through education that the gap between exclusion and inclusion can be built. Through this education the credibility of the child with special needs increases and he too becomes responsible and contributes meaningfully to the society. Through proper education poverty is controlled and opens a lot of avenues for the child with special needs. According to UNESCO the barriers of disability are not medical in nature but societal. It is the society that refuses to accept the diversity. Special schools cannot meet the holistic development and always expose the child to limited opportunities.

Whereas in mainstream schooling what is important is the opportunities the child enjoys and also the curriculum which makes every child learn the same thing maybe in a different way. The school administration, teachers, community members and family all have to come together to work for the holistic development of the child. We must educate our minds and learn to accept diversity with an open heart. Only with this mindset we can make a change.

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